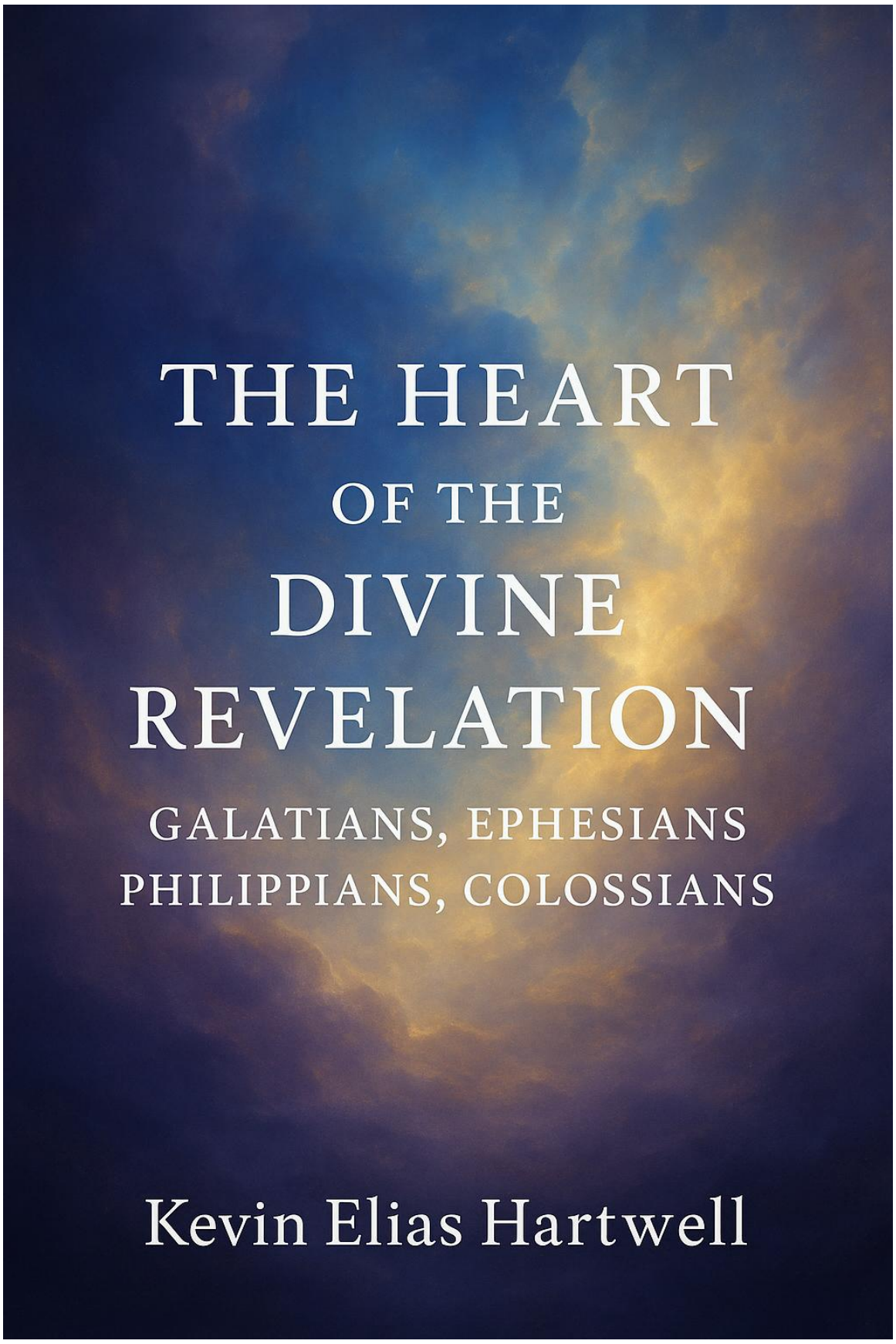
THE HEART
OF THE
DIVINE
REVELATION
GALATIANS, EPHESIANS
PHILIPPIANS, COLOSSIANS
Kevin Elias Hartwell

The Heart of the Divine Revelation

Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians

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1. Preface — The Heart of the Divine Revelation

The deepest current in the stream of divine revelation flows through four short letters written by the apostle Paul: Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians. Each was addressed to believers in real cities of the first century, read aloud in their gatherings, copied by hand, and passed from one local church to another. These epistles were not written as abstract theological treatises but as living communications to believers who were learning to know, experience, and express Christ together. Though distinct in emphasis, they are united in revelation and purpose. Together they form a living sequence of truth and experience that unveils the heart of the divine revelation and leads the reader progressively into God's eternal purpose in Christ and the church.

In Galatians, the issue is Christ versus religion. The believers had begun in the Spirit but were drifting back toward forms, ordinances, and the principle of self-effort. Paul's cry pierces through the centuries: “It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me” (Gal. 2:20). The cross terminates the old man, ends the self-life, and opens the way for the indwelling Christ to be expressed through His people. What God seeks is not the improvement of fallen humanity through religious practice but the manifestation of His Son within redeemed men and women.

Galatians therefore stands as a powerful declaration that the Christian life begins, continues, and reaches maturity only through Christ Himself lived out in the believer.

In Ephesians, the revelation opens wider and reaches into eternity. The veil is drawn back, and the eternal purpose of God is unveiled. Here we discover God's desire to head up all things in Christ and to obtain the church as His Body, His dwelling place, and His corporate expression. The mystery hidden throughout the ages is brought into the light: Christ and the church joined together in one divine-human entity. What begins in Galatians as Christ living in the believer develops in Ephesians into believers being built together into a spiritual house. Grace becomes building, life becomes corporate expression, and individual believers become living stones fitted together for God's habitation in spirit.

In Philippians, revelation becomes practical experience. The imprisoned apostle writes not with discouragement but with overflowing joy because Christ has become the content of his living. His testimony, "For to me, to live is Christ" (Phil. 1:21), reveals a life governed by a Person rather than by circumstances. Every situation becomes an opportunity for Christ to be magnified. Fellowship, suffering, service, endurance, and even imprisonment become channels through which the life of Christ is manifested. Philippians demonstrates that the revelation of Christ is never intended to remain merely objective doctrine; it must become subjective experience, daily enjoyment, and practical expression in the life of every believer.

In Colossians, the vision reaches its summit. All revelation gathers into one all-inclusive and all-extensive Person: Christ, the mystery of God. He is before all things, above all things, and the One in whom all things hold together. Every shadow, type, ordinance, philosophy, and religious substitute fades before His fullness. The Spirit declares that Christ is our life, our portion, and our everything. The goal of God's revelation is not merely that Christ would be known objectively, nor only that Christ would dwell within believers, but that Christ would become the very content of their living and the centrality and universality of all spiritual reality. In Colossians the reader arrives at the highest peak of Paul's revelation, where Christ fills all things and occupies the supreme place in God's economy.

These four letters trace a single divine progression:

- **Galatians** — Christ replaces self and religion through the cross and becomes the living principle of the Christian life.
- **Ephesians** — Christ and the church reveal God's eternal purpose through the Body, the one new man, and the dwelling place of God.
- **Philippians** — Christ is experienced, enjoyed, and expressed in the practical circumstances of daily living.
- **Colossians** — Christ is revealed as the all-inclusive and all-extensive One who is all and in all.

From deliverance to purpose, from purpose to experience, and from experience to fullness, the Spirit leads the believer into an ever-deepening realization of Christ. These four epistles unveil not merely a sequence of doctrines but a divine progression that brings God's people into the reality of the indwelling Christ and the building up of His Body. To read these letters as the early

churches received them, in simplicity, fellowship, and spiritual openness, is to touch again the living flow of divine revelation.

May the same Spirit who inspired these words illuminate them afresh to every seeking heart. May we see, as Paul saw, that Christ is our life, our center, and our all-sufficient One. May we also see that God's purpose is never merely individual but corporate, for through the church He desires to express Christ and ultimately fill all things with Himself. As these letters are opened before us, may the Lord grant us both revelation and experience, that we might know Christ more deeply and participate more fully in the fulfillment of God's eternal purpose.

2. Note to the Reader

The four letters gathered in these pages were not written to scholars, institutions, seminaries, or theological systems. They were written to believers living the church life in the first century. They originally circulated without chapter divisions, verse numbers, study notes, or modern publishing conventions. Carried by trusted brothers from city to city, they were read aloud in homes and assemblies, received with reverence, and treasured as the speaking of God through His apostle. Each letter came not merely as written instruction but as a living communication from the ascended Christ to His people. Through the apostolic ministry, the Lord Himself was speaking to the churches.

To read these letters rightly, we must seek to recover something of that original atmosphere. They are not merely historical documents to be examined, nor are they theological specimens to be dissected. They are living messages intended to bring believers into fellowship with Christ and into the practical reality of the church. The Spirit who inspired these writings has not ceased His speaking. He still breathes through the Scriptures today. He does not merely convey information to the mind; He imparts light to the heart, life to the spirit, and revelation to the inward man. When we read under His anointing, the written word becomes a living word, and what was once spoken in the first century becomes present speaking to us today.

This book follows the order Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians. These epistles are presented not as isolated writings but as a unified and progressive revelation of Christ and the church. Together they unveil a divine sequence that moves from deliverance from religion, to the revelation of God's eternal purpose, to the practical experience of Christ, and finally to the supreme vision of Christ as the all-inclusive and all-extensive One. Each epistle contributes a distinct portion of the revelation while simultaneously advancing the reader toward a fuller understanding of God's economy.

The arrangement of each section follows a consistent pattern:

- **Setting and Burden** — presenting the historical circumstances, the believers addressed, and the spiritual conditions that gave rise to the apostle's writing.
- **The Heart of the Revelation** — providing a flowing exposition guided by the central movement of the epistle and the Spirit's unfolding thought rather than by a merely analytical treatment of individual verses.

• **Christ Revealed and the Church Experienced** — considering how the revelation of Christ becomes practical reality in the life, fellowship, testimony, and corporate experience of God's people.
• **The Spirit's Word to Us Today** — drawing the spiritual significance of the epistle into the present experience of believers and applying its revelation to contemporary Christian life and church life.

You are invited to read prayerfully, thoughtfully, and without haste. Read these letters as those first believers heard them, allowing each phrase to breathe, each truth to unfold, and each revelation of Christ to linger within. Read aloud when possible. Pause often to pray. Allow the Spirit to transform understanding into fellowship, doctrine into experience, and revelation into spiritual reality. The goal is not merely to acquire knowledge concerning Christ but to know Christ Himself more deeply and to enter into the reality of what these letters reveal.

As these epistles are opened before you, may they also open your heart before the Lord. May the same Spirit who once filled those early gatherings fill you anew with the revelation of Jesus Christ, the Son of God who lives in His people, the Head of the church, the life of every believer, and the center of God's eternal purpose. May these pages lead not merely to greater understanding but to deeper fellowship with Christ, richer participation in His Body, and a clearer vision of the divine revelation that fills these four remarkable letters.

3. Introduction and Historical Background of Galatians

Paul's letter to the Galatians stands as a trumpet call to spiritual liberty, liberty not as license, but as life in the Spirit. Few writings in the New Testament are as passionate, personal, and penetrating. The apostle writes not from detachment but from deep anguish because the churches of Galatia had begun to drift from the pure gospel of Christ into the bondage of religion. His concern was not merely that certain practices had entered among the believers, but that the very principle of Christian living was being displaced. What was at stake was the believer's relationship to Christ Himself and the means by which the Christian life is lived and expressed.

The central conflict in Galatians is not between good and evil, but between Christ and religion. The believers had received the Spirit by faith, yet they were being persuaded to perfect themselves by law. Paul exposes this contradiction with the searching question: “Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?” (Gal. 3:3). The issue is not primarily moral conduct but the source and principle of living. Will the believer live by self-effort, religious observance, and natural strength, or will he live by the indwelling Christ through the Spirit? Throughout the epistle, Paul insists that what begins by faith must continue by faith and that what is born of the Spirit can never be perfected by the flesh.

Galatians reveals that the cross of Christ is not only for forgiveness but also for deliverance. Through the cross, believers are delivered from the condemnation of the law, from the influence of the world, and from the tyranny of the self. In Christ crucified, the old creation has been judged and terminated; in Christ resurrected, a new creation has begun. Paul therefore declares, “Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is a new creation” (Gal. 6:15). This new creation is the sphere of God's operation and the realm in which Christ lives and

is expressed through His redeemed people. The focus of the Christian life is therefore not external regulation but inward transformation through divine life.

The key to the letter is found in Paul's personal testimony: “I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me” (Gal. 2:20). These words open the heart of the gospel and summarize the central burden of the epistle. The Christian faith is not a system of ethical improvement, religious performance, or legal observance. It is the living Christ expressed through those who have received Him. The great issue of Galatians is therefore not what the believer does for Christ, but what Christ Himself desires to live out through the believer. The theme of the epistle may be summarized in a simple but profound declaration: Not I, but Christ.

Paul's tone throughout the letter is intense because the stakes are extraordinarily high. To revert to law after knowing grace is to abandon the principle upon which God operates. To trust in the flesh after receiving the Spirit is to frustrate the purpose of God. For this reason, Paul vigorously defends both the divine origin of his gospel and the divine source of his apostleship. He reminds the Galatians that the message he preached was not received from men, nor taught by men, but came through direct revelation from Jesus Christ Himself (Gal. 1:12). The authority of the gospel rests not upon human tradition but upon divine revelation.

Historical Setting

The letter was addressed to a group of churches located within the Roman province of Galatia in Asia Minor, corresponding to portions of modern-day Turkey. Unlike some of Paul's other epistles, Galatians was not written to a single church in one city but to multiple churches scattered throughout a geographical region. These churches were likely established during the first apostolic journey of Paul and Barnabas and included the assemblies in Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe (Acts 13–14). The epistle therefore addresses a regional crisis affecting several local churches rather than a problem confined to one locality.

Galatia derived its name from the Gauls, a Celtic people who migrated eastward from Europe and settled in Asia Minor during the third century B.C. Although later incorporated into the Roman Empire and formally organized as a province in 25 B.C., the inhabitants retained much of their distinctive character. Ancient writers often described them as enthusiastic, generous, impulsive, and easily influenced. Such characteristics help explain both their warm reception of Paul's ministry and their vulnerability to the persuasive efforts of the Judaizing teachers who later troubled the churches.

The term Galatia can be understood in two related ways:

- **Ethnic Galatia** — referring to the northern territory occupied by the original Celtic tribes who settled in the region.
- **Provincial Galatia** — referring to the larger Roman administrative province that included the southern cities of Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe.

Most evidence suggests that Paul's letter was addressed to the churches located in the southern portion of the Roman province. These churches were founded during the first missionary journey and became some of the earliest Gentile assemblies established through Paul's ministry.

The Crisis in the Churches

After Paul's departure, certain Judaizing teachers entered among the believers. These men professed faith in Christ yet insisted that Gentile believers must also submit to the requirements of the Mosaic Law. Their teaching challenged both the sufficiency of Christ and the validity of Paul's apostleship. They argued that faith alone was inadequate and that circumcision, along with observance of the law, was necessary for full acceptance before God.

The danger posed by this teaching was profound. The issue was not merely circumcision but the introduction of an entirely different principle of relationship with God. Grace and law represent two fundamentally different ways of approaching God. One rests upon what Christ has accomplished; the other depends upon what man attempts to accomplish. Paul's response is therefore immediate and uncompromising because the very foundation of the gospel was under attack. To accept righteousness through the law would be to nullify the grace of God and render the death of Christ unnecessary (Gal. 2:21).

Paul's Relationship to the Galatians

Paul's relationship with the Galatian believers had originally been marked by deep affection and mutual appreciation. He first preached the gospel among them through a weakness in the flesh (Gal. 4:13). Although his physical condition could have caused them to reject him, they instead received him with remarkable warmth and hospitality. Paul recalls that they welcomed him as an angel of God and even as Christ Jesus Himself. Their love was so genuine that he could say they would have plucked out their own eyes and given them to him if such a thing had been possible.

The situation changed dramatically after the arrival of the false teachers. Those who had once loved Paul now viewed him with suspicion because he continued to speak the truth. The apostle therefore asks the painful question: “Have I therefore become your enemy because I tell you the truth?” (Gal. 4:16). The emotional force of the letter reflects not only doctrinal concern but also the sorrow of a spiritual father watching his children drift away from the freedom they had once enjoyed in Christ.

Date and Circumstances of Writing

Galatians was likely written from Syrian Antioch around A.D. 48–49, making it one of Paul's earliest surviving letters. Many scholars place its composition shortly before the meeting recorded in Acts 15, where the apostles and elders considered the relationship of Gentile believers to the Mosaic Law. The fact that Paul makes no direct reference to that gathering, despite its relevance to the issues addressed in the letter, suggests that Galatians was written before the council took place.

Purpose and Message

Paul wrote Galatians to defend the pure gospel of grace and to reaffirm the revelation of Christ living within the believer. The errors he confronted in the first century continue to reappear throughout Christian history because fallen humanity naturally gravitates toward religious systems and self-effort. The apostle therefore exposes two persistent dangers:

• The attempt to mix law with grace.
• The attempt to begin in the Spirit but seek perfection through the flesh.

To both errors Paul presents the same divine answer: “It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me” (Gal. 2:20).

Galatians stands as the charter of spiritual freedom. It declares that believers have been redeemed from the curse of the law, crucified to the world, and brought into a living relationship with Christ through the Spirit. The cross, not the law, defines the believer's standing before God. The Spirit, not the flesh, governs the believer's walk. Freedom in Galatians is therefore not independence from God but liberation unto Christ.

In its structure, the epistle moves from defense in chapters one and two, to doctrine in chapters three and four, and finally to practical application in chapters five and six. Paul first defends the divine source of his apostleship and message. He then unfolds the great contrasts between law and grace, promise and bondage, flesh and Spirit. Finally, he calls believers to walk by the Spirit and bear the fruit that only divine life can produce.

Thus the letter to the Galatians is far more than an ancient controversy preserved on parchment. It remains a living word of deliverance for every generation of believers. Its call is timeless: to abandon confidence in self, reject the bondage of religion, and live by the indwelling Christ. The message of Galatians may ultimately be summarized in one declaration: Christ versus religion, the cross as our freedom, and the Spirit as our life.

4. Galatians — Christ vs. Religion: Not I, but Christ

Among all Paul's writings, Galatians stands as one of the clearest declarations of the absolute sufficiency of Christ. The epistle was written during a crisis, yet the issue before the apostle was not merely doctrinal confusion or ecclesiastical controversy. The conflict reached to the very heart of God's purpose. The churches of Galatia had received Christ, experienced the Spirit, and begun their Christian walk in faith, yet they were being drawn back into religious observances and legal requirements. What appeared to be a minor adjustment to the gospel was in reality a fundamental departure from the divine economy. The issue confronting the Galatians remains the issue confronting believers in every generation: Is the Christian life lived by Christ or by religion?

Religion often appears attractive because it offers visible standards, measurable achievements, and a sense of human accomplishment. Fallen humanity instinctively seeks a system that allows man to contribute something to his own standing before God. Yet the gospel proclaims something radically different. God's purpose is not to improve the old creation but to replace it with Christ. The Christian life is therefore not a matter of self-improvement but of divine replacement. What God desires is not a better version of Adam but the expression of Christ in redeemed humanity.

Paul immediately confronts the Galatians with the seriousness of their departure. Unlike many of his other epistles, Galatians contains no extended thanksgiving before correction begins. Instead, the apostle expresses astonishment that they were "turning away so soon" from the One who had called them in the grace of Christ (Gal. 1:6). The problem was not merely theological

error. They were abandoning a living Person for a religious system. They were exchanging grace for law, revelation for tradition, and Christ for religious observance.

The Divine Origin of the Gospel — Revelation, Not Tradition

A major burden of the opening chapters is Paul's defense of the divine origin of the gospel he preached. His message did not originate in Jerusalem, religious tradition, or human instruction. It came directly through revelation of Jesus Christ. "I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through the revelation of Jesus Christ" (Gal. 1:12).

This declaration establishes one of the fundamental principles of the Christian faith. Genuine spiritual reality originates in revelation. Religious systems depend upon inherited tradition, external regulations, and institutional authority. The gospel depends upon God's unveiling of His Son. Christianity at its source is not a religion but a revelation. The central issue is not what man can do for God but what God has revealed in Christ.

Paul's own experience illustrates this principle perfectly. As Saul of Tarsus he possessed impeccable religious credentials. He advanced in Judaism beyond many of his contemporaries and was zealous for the traditions of his fathers. Yet all of his religious attainments failed to bring him into the knowledge of God's purpose. Only when Christ was revealed to him did he understand the meaning of the Scriptures he had studied throughout his life. The turning point was not a change of religion but an encounter with a living Person.

The Cross and the End of the Old Creation

One of the dominant themes of Galatians is the terminating work of the cross. Many believers understand that Christ died for their sins, yet Galatians reveals that Christ's death accomplished far more than forgiveness. The cross brings the entire old creation to an end. It terminates the flesh, the self, the world, and every claim of religious effort upon the believer's life.

Paul therefore writes, "But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world" (Gal. 6:14). The world spoken of here includes not only sinful practices but also religious systems that operate apart from Christ. The flesh can express itself through obvious sin, but it can also express itself through religious zeal, legal observance, and spiritual pride. The cross judges all alike because all belong to the old creation.

This is why Paul's confrontation with the Judaizers was so uncompromising. Their teaching appeared spiritual and scriptural. They advocated circumcision, a practice rooted in divine revelation given to Abraham. Yet by requiring circumcision as a condition of spiritual standing, they shifted the focus from Christ to human performance. In doing so, they undermined the very foundation of the gospel.

The Spirit Versus the Flesh

The central practical question of Galatians appears in Paul's challenge: "Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?" (Gal. 3:3). This question exposes a tendency that has persisted throughout Christian history. Believers often begin by trusting Christ and then

attempt to mature through self-effort. What begins in dependence upon God gradually becomes dependence upon human ability.

Paul insists that spiritual life operates according to an entirely different principle. The Christian life is sustained in exactly the same way it begins: through faith and by the Spirit. Growth does not come through stronger resolutions, stricter regulations, or greater self-discipline alone. Growth comes through the operation of divine life within the believer.

The flesh in Galatians refers not merely to the sinful nature but to fallen humanity attempting to accomplish spiritual objectives through natural strength. Even sincere religious effort becomes an obstacle when it replaces dependence upon Christ. The Spirit and the flesh represent two opposing principles. One proceeds from God; the other proceeds from fallen man. One produces life; the other produces bondage.

Sonship and the Enjoyment of Christ

Galatians moves beyond deliverance from law into the positive enjoyment of sonship. God's goal is not merely to free believers from religious bondage but to bring them into the enjoyment of Christ as sons of God. Through redemption, believers receive not only forgiveness but also the Spirit of the Son.

"And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, 'Abba, Father!'" (Gal. 4:6).

This verse reveals the experiential center of the Christian life. The Spirit dwelling within believers is not merely a power for service or a source of spiritual gifts. He is the Spirit of the Son bringing believers into living fellowship with the Father. Christianity is therefore not fundamentally a system of commandments but a family relationship established through divine life.

The contrast between law and sonship is one of the most beautiful themes in the epistle. Under law, individuals relate to God through regulations and obligations. Under grace, believers relate to God as children sharing the life of their Father. The Christian life is not characterized by fear of punishment but by participation in divine fellowship.

Christ Lives in Me

The theological and experiential climax of Galatians is found in Paul's testimony: "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me" (Gal. 2:20).

These words summarize the entire burden of the epistle. The Christian life is neither self-improvement nor self-suppression. It is Christ replacing the self as the source of living. Paul's statement does not suggest the annihilation of personality but the displacement of self as the governing center of life. The believer continues to live, think, choose, and act, yet the source becomes Christ rather than the independent self.

This truth lies at the heart of God's economy. God does not merely desire people who believe certain doctrines about Christ. He desires a people through whom Christ Himself may be

expressed. The goal of redemption is therefore not simply forgiveness, justification, or even sanctification considered separately. The goal is the manifestation of Christ in His people.

The New Creation

The epistle concludes where God's purpose ultimately rests: the new creation. "Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is a new creation" (Gal. 6:15).

All religious distinctions disappear in the light of this reality. Human achievements, religious credentials, ceremonial observances, and natural advantages possess no spiritual value in themselves. God's interest is centered upon the new creation produced through union with Christ.

The new creation is not merely individual transformation. It is the beginning of a new humanity in Christ. Here the revelation of Galatians prepares the way for Ephesians. Christ living in the individual believer becomes Christ expressed corporately in His Body. Personal deliverance ultimately serves a corporate purpose. God's intention is not merely to produce spiritual individuals but to obtain the church as the expression of His Son.

Galatians therefore stands as a perpetual call back to spiritual reality. Whenever believers substitute religion for Christ, law for grace, tradition for revelation, or self-effort for the Spirit, the message of Galatians becomes immediately relevant. The epistle summons the church in every age to return to the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ.

Its message remains unchanged: not law, but grace; not flesh, but Spirit; not self, but Christ.

Not I, but Christ.

5. Introduction to Ephesians

If Galatians stands as the great declaration of spiritual liberty, Ephesians stands as the unveiling of God's eternal purpose. Many have rightly called Ephesians the highest peak of divine revelation in the New Testament because nowhere else does Paul open so fully the mystery of Christ and the church. In Galatians, the believer is delivered from the bondage of religion and brought into the enjoyment of Christ as life. In Ephesians, the horizon expands beyond the individual believer to encompass God's purpose throughout the ages. The focus is no longer merely what Christ has done for us or even what Christ is within us, but what God intends to accomplish through Christ and the church according to His eternal plan.

Ephesians lifts the reader above the circumstances of earth and into the heavenly realm of God's purpose. From its opening verses, the epistle speaks the language of eternity. Before addressing practical matters, Paul directs attention to God's eternal choice, eternal purpose, eternal inheritance, and eternal glory. The church is not presented as a temporary institution or merely a gathering of believers. Rather, it is revealed as the Body of Christ, the fullness of the One who fills all in all (Eph. 1:22–23). Here the reader encounters the church not primarily from the perspective of history but from the perspective of God's eternal intention.

At the heart of Ephesians stands the revelation of the mystery. Throughout previous ages, God's purpose remained hidden, concealed within Himself. The prophets saw portions of it. The

patriarchs anticipated aspects of it. Types and shadows pointed toward it. Yet the full revelation awaited the coming of Christ and the ministry of the apostles. Paul declares that this mystery has now been made known through divine revelation (Eph. 3:3–5). The mystery is not merely Christ, nor merely the church, but Christ and the church united together according to God's eternal purpose.

This revelation elevates Ephesians above a simple theological treatise. The epistle unveils God's ultimate intention in creation, redemption, and salvation. God is not merely saving individuals from judgment. He is producing a corporate expression of His Son. Through the church, Christ is manifested, God's wisdom is displayed, and His eternal purpose advances toward its consummation. What begins in eternity past with divine selection ultimately reaches its fulfillment in a corporate people built together as God's dwelling place in spirit.

The atmosphere of Ephesians differs noticeably from that of Galatians. Galatians is marked by conflict, correction, and urgent warning. Ephesians is marked by worship, revelation, and spiritual vision. In Galatians, Paul writes as a spiritual father defending his children from danger. In Ephesians, he writes as a steward of divine revelation unveiling the highest truths concerning God's economy. The contrast is not accidental. Once believers are delivered from religious bondage, they become prepared to receive a broader vision of God's purpose. Freedom from religion is not the goal; it is preparation for participation in God's eternal plan.

The Apostolic Churches and the Recipients of the Epistle

Before considering the historical background of Ephesians, it is important to recognize the ecclesiological setting in which the epistle was written. Paul's letters were not originally addressed to denominations, independent congregations, ministry organizations, or competing religious fellowships. They were written within the framework of the apostolic churches revealed throughout the New Testament. This observation is not incidental but forms part of the context in which the apostolic revelation was given and received.

This reality is particularly evident in Galatians. Paul explicitly addresses his letter "to the churches of Galatia" (Gal. 1:2). The book of Acts enables us to identify these churches with considerable confidence. During the first apostolic journey, Paul and Barnabas established the church in Antioch, Pisidia, the church in Iconium, the church in Lystra, and the church in Derbe (Acts 13–14). These churches were not separate bodies distinguished by doctrine, ethnicity, personality, or ministerial affiliation. They were local expressions of the one Body of Christ within their respective cities and together participated in the fellowship of the apostolic churches.

Many modern readers overlook the significance of this pattern. They readily recognize the universal aspect of the church while giving little attention to its practical local expression. As a result, the churches mentioned throughout Acts, the Epistles, and Revelation are often treated as historical details rather than as part of the apostolic pattern itself. Yet the New Testament consistently presents one Body universally expressed through local churches in identifiable cities.

This local aspect of the church deserves careful attention because it is closely related to one of the great themes of Scripture: the practical oneness of God's people. Throughout the Old

Testament, God preserved the unity of Israel through one good land, one chosen city, and one temple where He placed His name. With the death and resurrection of Christ, worship was no longer confined to Jerusalem, for the Lord declared that true worshippers would worship the Father in spirit and truth (John 4:23–24). The Last Adam became the life-giving Spirit and entered into His believers, making spiritual worship possible in every place. Yet while the center of worship changed from a geographical location to the indwelling Christ, the principle of practical oneness remained. Thus, throughout the New Testament, the one Body of Christ was expressed through local churches established according to cities. The church in Jerusalem, the church in Antioch, the church in Corinth, the church in Ephesus, and the churches of Galatia all bear witness to this pattern. The universal church and the local churches are therefore not competing concepts but two aspects of the same divine revelation: one Body universally expressed through local churches throughout the earth.

The situation in Ephesians is slightly different. Some ancient manuscripts omit the words "in Ephesus" from the opening greeting, leading many scholars to suggest that the epistle circulated among several churches in the province of Asia. Whatever conclusions may be reached concerning the original destination of the letter, there can be little doubt that Paul was writing within the framework of apostolic local church life. The epistle assumes a corporate church reality rather than an abstract universal concept detached from practical expression.

This becomes evident in Ephesians 2:22, where Paul writes, "in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit." The language is corporate, practical, and experiential. The church is not presented merely as an invisible theological concept but as believers being built together into God's habitation. Such language presupposes actual church life among actual believers living in fellowship with one another.

The wider New Testament testimony removes any uncertainty concerning the existence of the church in Ephesus. Acts records Paul's lengthy ministry there and his intimate relationship with the Ephesian elders (Acts 19–20). Later, the risen Christ addresses the church in Ephesus as the first of the seven churches in Asia (Rev. 2:1). Whatever textual questions may surround the opening greeting of Ephesians, the New Testament clearly recognizes the church in Ephesus as an identifiable local church and a golden lampstand bearing testimony to Jesus Christ within its city.

The significance of this observation should not be underestimated. The same apostle who revealed the church as the Body of Christ also recognized local churches according to cities. In Paul's understanding, these were not competing truths but complementary aspects of the same revelation. The one Body required practical expression, and that expression appeared in the local churches. Thus the highest revelations concerning Christ and the church were not given apart from local church life but within it.

Millions of Christians have never seriously considered the local aspect of the church revealed in the New Testament. Many readily acknowledge the universal church and rejoice in the truth that all believers belong to the Body of Christ, yet they have never been helped to see how that one Body was practically expressed in the apostolic churches. As a result, the ecclesiological framework of Acts, the Epistles, and Revelation often remains hidden in plain sight.

For this reason, the present study approaches Ephesians within the same context in which it was originally given. The revelation of Christ and the church contained in this epistle was not delivered in isolation from the apostolic churches. It was entrusted to believers living the church life within the fellowship of local churches. The highest revelation in the New Testament concerning God's eternal purpose, the Body of Christ, the one new man, and the dwelling place of God was given within that setting. To appreciate the epistle fully, we must endeavor to read it within the same apostolic framework in which it was written, received, and practiced.

Historical Setting

The epistle was addressed to the church in Ephesus, one of the most significant cities of the Roman Empire. Situated near the western coast of Asia Minor, Ephesus functioned as an important commercial, political, and cultural center. Its strategic location connected trade routes from various parts of the empire, making it a gateway between East and West. Merchants, travelers, government officials, philosophers, and religious pilgrims continually passed through the city. As a result, Ephesus exercised an influence extending far beyond its immediate boundaries and became one of the most prominent urban centers in the ancient world.

Ephesus was also renowned for the Temple of Artemis, one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. This magnificent structure attracted visitors from throughout the empire and contributed greatly to the city's wealth and reputation. Religious devotion, commercial prosperity, and pagan culture were deeply intertwined within the life of the city. The worship of Artemis shaped much of the social and economic fabric of Ephesian society. Against this backdrop of pagan religion and spiritual darkness, the gospel established a powerful testimony to Jesus Christ that would eventually affect the entire surrounding region.

The city's strategic importance made it an ideal center for the spread of the gospel. Located within the Roman province of Asia, Ephesus served as a hub from which the word of God could radiate throughout neighboring cities and regions. What occurred in Ephesus therefore had consequences far beyond a single locality. The church established there became one of the most influential apostolic churches of the first century and played a significant role in the spread of the Christian testimony throughout Asia Minor.

The Church in Ephesus

Paul first encountered Ephesus near the conclusion of his second apostolic journey (Acts 18:18–21). Although his initial visit was brief, he left with the promise that he would return if God willed. During his third journey, he fulfilled that promise and remained in Ephesus for approximately three years (Acts 19–20). This extended period of ministry allowed him to establish a deep spiritual foundation among the believers and to unfold many of the truths that would later appear in his epistle.

The work in Ephesus was marked by extraordinary spiritual power. Through the preaching of the gospel, many were converted from paganism and brought into the reality of Christ. The influence of the word extended throughout the province of Asia, so that many heard the gospel through the testimony that originated in Ephesus. Luke records that "the word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed" (Acts 19:20). The growth of the testimony demonstrated that the gospel was not merely introducing a new religion but bringing people into a living relationship with the risen Christ.

One of the most striking events associated with the Ephesian revival was the public renunciation of occult practices. Many who had practiced magic brought their books together and burned them openly before all. Their willingness to forsake both spiritual darkness and significant financial investment testified to the transforming power of the gospel. Christ had become more precious to them than the practices and possessions that had once governed their lives.

The success of the gospel eventually provoked opposition. As increasing numbers turned away from idolatry, the economic interests connected with the worship of Artemis began to suffer. This culminated in the riot led by Demetrius the silversmith (Acts 19:23–41). The disturbance revealed how deeply the gospel had penetrated the culture of the city. The conflict was not merely religious but economic, social, and spiritual. The testimony of Christ had become powerful enough to challenge an entire system built upon idolatry.

Paul's relationship with the Ephesian believers was unusually deep. This is evident in his farewell meeting with the Ephesian elders at Miletus (Acts 20:17–38). There he reminded them that he had declared to them the whole counsel of God and had served among them with humility, tears, and perseverance. He warned them concerning future dangers and charged them to shepherd the flock of God faithfully. The emotional nature of their farewell demonstrates the strong bond that existed between the apostle and the church.

The church in Ephesus possessed a rich spiritual heritage. Unlike the churches of Galatia, which were struggling with legalism, or the church in Corinth, which was troubled by divisions and moral failures, the Ephesian believers appear to have enjoyed a relatively healthy spiritual condition. This helps explain why the epistle contains comparatively little correction. Paul's burden is not primarily to resolve crises but to unveil revelation. The church had matured sufficiently to receive some of the highest truths concerning God's eternal purpose, the Body of Christ, the one new man, and the dwelling place of God.

Date and Circumstances of Writing

Ephesians was written during Paul's imprisonment in Rome, probably around A.D. 60–62. Along with Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon, it belongs to the group commonly known as the Prison Epistles. Although physically confined, Paul was spiritually elevated. His outward circumstances were restrictive, yet the revelation contained within these letters reaches some of the highest peaks found anywhere in the New Testament.

The circumstances of imprisonment highlight an important principle. Divine revelation is not dependent upon outward freedom or favorable conditions. While confined to a Roman prison, Paul was granted fresh insight into God's eternal purpose and the central place of Christ within that purpose. What appeared outwardly to be a limitation became the setting for the communication of truths that would enrich the church throughout the centuries.

The epistle was likely carried by Tychicus, a faithful fellow worker and beloved brother in the Lord (Eph. 6:21–22). He also delivered the letter to the Colossians and served as an important link between the imprisoned apostle and the churches. Through his ministry, the revelation entrusted to Paul continued to circulate among the believers and strengthen the churches.

Purpose and Message

The purpose of Ephesians is not primarily corrective but revelatory. Paul writes to unveil God's eternal purpose in Christ and to show how that purpose is realized through the church. Throughout the epistle, Christ stands at the center of every aspect of God's economy. The Father has purposed all things in Christ, accomplished redemption through Christ, and intends ultimately to head up all things in Christ. The church exists within that purpose as the corporate expression of His Son.

Several major themes emerge throughout the epistle.

- **God's Eternal Purpose** — Before the foundation of the world, God purposed to obtain a people in Christ for His glory and satisfaction.
- **Christ as the Center and Content of God's Purpose** — Everything in God's economy converges upon Christ and finds its meaning in Him.
- **The Church as the Body of Christ** — The church is revealed as the living organism through which Christ is expressed on the earth.
- **The Fullness of Christ** — The church is the fullness of the One who fills all in all, expressing His riches corporately.
- **The One New Man** — Jews and Gentiles are reconciled in Christ and created into one new man, terminating former distinctions and divisions.
- **The Dwelling Place of God** — Believers are being built together into a habitation of God in spirit.
- **The Building Up of the Body** — Every member has a function in the growth and building up of the Body of Christ.
- **Spiritual Warfare** — The church must stand against the spiritual forces that oppose God's purpose and testimony.

The structure of the epistle reflects these themes. Chapters one through three focus primarily upon revelation. Paul unveils God's eternal purpose, the riches of Christ, the mystery hidden throughout the ages, and the church as the corporate expression of Christ. Chapters four through six focus upon practical living. Believers are exhorted to walk worthily of their calling, maintain the oneness of the Spirit, function within the Body, live in resurrection life, and stand against spiritual opposition. Thus revelation becomes experience, doctrine becomes practice, and heavenly vision becomes earthly testimony.

The message of Ephesians ultimately centers upon God's desire to head up all things in Christ (Eph. 1:10). The disorder introduced through sin will one day be brought into harmony under the universal headship of Christ. The church occupies a central place within this purpose, not as an afterthought or temporary arrangement, but as the corporate vessel through which God's eternal intention is being carried out.

If Galatians may be summarized by the declaration, "Not I, but Christ," then Ephesians may be summarized by the phrase, "Christ and the church according to God's eternal purpose." Here the believer is invited to look beyond personal concerns, religious questions, and earthly circumstances to behold the vast panorama of God's economy. Through Ephesians we learn not

only who Christ is and what He has accomplished, but why God created, redeemed, and is building His people into one corporate expression for His eternal glory.

6. Ephesians — The Mystery of Christ: Head Up All Things in Christ

The letter to the Ephesians stands among the highest peaks of divine revelation found anywhere in the Scriptures. If Galatians brings us to Christ as our life and liberty, Ephesians brings us into God's eternal purpose concerning Christ and the church. The apostle does not begin with man's need, human failure, or even redemption itself. Instead, he begins in eternity past, before the foundation of the world, where God conceived a purpose centered entirely in His Son. The perspective of Ephesians is therefore not earthly but heavenly, not temporal but eternal. The reader is invited to look beyond the events of history and behold the divine intention that governs all things.

From the opening chapter, Paul directs our attention to the will and purpose of God. Believers were chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world, predestined unto sonship, redeemed through His blood, and brought into the knowledge of God's mystery (Eph. 1:3–9). These blessings are not isolated acts of divine kindness but components of a single eternal purpose. God's work in redemption serves a larger objective. The Father is carrying out a plan conceived before time itself, and every aspect of salvation contributes to that purpose.

At the center of this revelation stands the mystery of Christ. In the New Testament, a mystery is not something mysterious in the modern sense but a divine reality once hidden and now revealed. Throughout the ages, God's purpose remained concealed within Himself. The patriarchs saw glimpses of it. The prophets spoke concerning it in shadow and promise. Yet the full significance of God's intention awaited the coming of Christ and the ministry of the apostles. Paul declares that God has now made known "the mystery of His will" according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Christ (Eph. 1:9).

The content of this mystery reaches its climax in one of the most remarkable statements in the epistle: "that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might head up all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth—in Him" (Eph. 1:10). Here we are brought to the governing thought of the entire book. God's purpose is not merely to save individuals, improve society, or establish religious institutions. His purpose is to bring all things under the headship of Christ. Everything that has been scattered, divided, damaged, and disordered through sin will ultimately be gathered together and brought into harmony under the authority and life of God's Son.

The need for such a heading up becomes apparent when we consider the present condition of creation. The universe bears the marks of rebellion, disorder, and fragmentation. Humanity is divided against itself. Nations contend with nations. Families are fractured. Even among believers, division and confusion have often obscured God's testimony. Sin has introduced disintegration wherever it has operated. Yet God's answer to this universal disorder is not merely correction but Christ. The Son of God is both the center and the means of the divine recovery. Through Him, God is carrying out a work that will ultimately restore all things to their proper relationship under His authority.

Running concurrently with God's work of heading up all things in Christ is another mystery operating throughout the present age. Paul declares that "the mystery of lawlessness is already at work" (2 Thess. 2:7). Just as God's purpose moves progressively toward its consummation in Christ and the church, the principle of rebellion moves progressively toward its consummation in the final manifestation of Babylon the Great. The mystery of Christ and the mystery of lawlessness therefore develop side by side throughout history until both reach their full disclosure in the book of Revelation. One mystery leads to the Bride, the Lamb's wife; the other culminates in the harlot called "MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH" (Rev. 17:5).

This mystery of lawlessness is not merely political but also religious. Throughout the centuries it has worked to corrupt the truth concerning Christ, the truth concerning salvation, and the truth concerning the church. False teachings concerning the person of Christ, departures from the gospel of grace, and distortions of the apostolic pattern of the churches all bear witness to an opposing principle at work in human history. The culmination of this mystery appears in Revelation as a vast counterfeit system standing in opposition to God's purpose. Just as the divine revelation moves toward Christ and the New Jerusalem, the satanic counterfeit moves toward Babylon and final judgment.

Revelation further discloses what may be called a satanic trinity consisting of the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet. The dragon seeks worship, the beast receives worship, and the false prophet directs worship toward the beast. Together they form a counterfeit of the divine operation of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Yet the outcome is never uncertain. The mystery of lawlessness operates only within limits established by God and will ultimately be judged and removed. The divine purpose will prevail. Christ will head up all things in Himself, and every opposing authority will be brought to nothing.

Significantly, the church occupies a central place within God's purpose. Christ is not merely Head over all things; He is also Head of the church, which is His Body (Eph. 1:22–23). The church therefore stands as the first sphere in which God's purpose of heading up all things in Christ is being realized. Before the entire universe is brought into harmony under Christ, God is producing a corporate people who live under His headship today. The church becomes both the vessel and the testimony of God's eternal purpose.

This relationship between Christ and the church forms the heart of the mystery revealed in Ephesians. The church is not an afterthought in God's plan, nor a temporary arrangement introduced because of unforeseen circumstances. The church was included within God's eternal purpose from the beginning. Through redemption and regeneration, believers are joined to Christ and constituted members of His Body. What was hidden throughout the ages is now revealed: Christ desires a corporate expression through which His life, authority, wisdom, and glory may be manifested.

Paul develops this revelation further in chapter three, where he speaks of "the mystery of Christ" (Eph. 3:4). This mystery includes the bringing together of Jews and Gentiles into one new man. Former distinctions, barriers, and hostilities are removed in Christ. Through the cross, God creates one new corporate entity composed of all His redeemed people. The church therefore

stands as a testimony not only to redemption but also to reconciliation, unity, and the triumph of God's purpose over every dividing wall erected by man.

The practical implications of this revelation are immense. If Christ is heading up all things in Himself, then believers must learn to live under His headship in every aspect of life. The Christian life is not merely a matter of individual spirituality. It is participation in God's eternal purpose. Every aspect of growth in Christ contributes to the building up of His Body. Every member has a function. Every believer has a place. The church becomes the sphere in which Christ is expressed corporately and God's purpose advances progressively toward its consummation.

The preservation of such a testimony requires more than correct doctrine alone. The New Testament reveals a threefold fellowship consisting of fellowship with the Son of God, fellowship within the local church, and fellowship among the churches. Alongside this fellowship stands a threefold preservation platform. Issachar provides spiritual discernment concerning patterns and the times. The Berean spirit continually tests and confirms all teaching by the Scriptures. Genuine koinonia supplies the free circulation of divine life and light among the saints. Together these realities help preserve the practical church life from deception, isolation, authoritarianism, hidden corruption, and spiritual drift while contributing positively to God's purpose of heading up all things in Christ.

The revelation of Ephesians ultimately lifts our eyes to the future consummation of God's purpose. What is now being worked out in the church will one day encompass the entire universe. Christ will be universally acknowledged as Lord. Every opposing authority will be subdued. All things in heaven and on earth will be brought into proper order under His headship. The confusion introduced through sin will give way to the harmony produced by Christ. God's eternal purpose will stand fully accomplished.

Thus the message of Ephesians reaches far beyond personal blessing or individual salvation. It unveils the vast panorama of God's economy centered in Christ. The Father is working toward a single glorious objective: to head up all things in Christ. The church, as His Body, participates in that purpose today and anticipates its universal fulfillment in the ages to come. Here the believer is brought into the highest vision of the New Testament—not merely Christ as Savior, nor even Christ as life, but Christ as the center, content, and goal of God's eternal purpose.

7. Introduction to Philippians

If Ephesians unveils God's eternal purpose concerning Christ and the church, Philippians reveals the practical experience of Christ in the daily life of the believer. Ephesians lifts us into the heavenly realm of divine purpose, where we behold the mystery hidden throughout the ages and now revealed through the apostles. Philippians brings that revelation down into the ordinary circumstances of human life and demonstrates what it means to live Christ in a fallen world. Here doctrine becomes experience, vision becomes walk, and revelation becomes practical living.

Among Paul's letters, Philippians occupies a unique place. It is one of the warmest, most personal, and most experiential books in the New Testament. The apostle writes not as a

theologian unfolding great doctrinal truths nor as a spiritual father correcting serious problems, but as a mature servant of Christ sharing the secret of a life wholly occupied with the Lord. The atmosphere of the epistle is marked by joy, fellowship, encouragement, and spiritual affection. Yet this joy is not superficial happiness arising from favorable circumstances. It is the deep and abiding joy that comes from knowing, loving, and experiencing Christ.

The key to the entire epistle is found in Paul's remarkable declaration: "For to me, to live is Christ" (Phil. 1:21). These words express far more than a theological conviction. They reveal the governing reality of Paul's life. Christ was not merely the object of his worship, the subject of his preaching, or the source of his salvation. Christ had become the content of his living. Every circumstance, whether favorable or adverse, became an opportunity for the life of Christ to be expressed through him.

Philippians therefore presents the Christian life in its most practical form. Galatians proclaims, "Not I, but Christ." Ephesians unveils Christ and the church according to God's eternal purpose. Philippians shows what happens when a believer actually lives by that revelation. The result is a life characterized by joy, humility, obedience, fellowship, and steadfastness regardless of outward conditions. The epistle demonstrates that Christ is not merely a doctrine to be understood but a person to be experienced and expressed.

The circumstances under which the letter was written make its message all the more remarkable. Paul writes from imprisonment, facing uncertainty regarding his future and the possibility of execution. Yet the epistle overflows with joy. Rejoicing appears repeatedly throughout its pages. Such joy cannot be explained by circumstances. It arises from Christ Himself. Paul had learned that outward situations may change, but Christ remains constant. Consequently, his confidence rests not in circumstances but in the Lord whom he knows and enjoys.

The Apostolic Church in Philippi

As with the other epistles considered in this study, Philippians was originally written within the framework of the apostolic churches. The opening greeting is addressed "to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the overseers and deacons" (Phil. 1:1). Although Paul does not explicitly use the expression "the church in Philippi" in the introduction, the mention of overseers and deacons immediately indicates the existence of an identifiable local church. Such leadership was not appointed independently but functioned within the practical life of a local church.

The matter becomes even clearer later in the epistle. In Philippians 4:15 Paul writes, "Now you Philippians know also that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church shared with me concerning giving and receiving but you only." Here the apostle explicitly identifies the Philippian believers as a church. The church in Philippi therefore stands alongside the church in Jerusalem, the church in Antioch, the church in Corinth, the church in Ephesus, and the other apostolic churches revealed throughout the New Testament.

This testimony is important because it confirms once again the apostolic pattern of one Body expressed through local churches according to cities. The believers in Philippi were not

identified by a special doctrine, a particular ministry, or a distinctive practice. Their identity was determined by Christ and their locality. They were the church in Philippi, a local expression of the one universal Body of Christ participating in the fellowship of the churches.

The church in Philippi occupies a special place in the New Testament record. It was the first church established by Paul on European soil and came into existence through a series of remarkable providential events recorded in Acts 16. After being restrained by the Holy Spirit from preaching in certain regions of Asia Minor, Paul received a vision of a Macedonian man pleading, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." Concluding that God had called them to preach the gospel there, Paul and his companions crossed into Europe, bringing the gospel into a new sphere of testimony.

The beginning of the church in Philippi illustrates the diverse way in which God builds His church. Among the first converts was Lydia, a seller of purple from Thyatira whose heart the Lord opened to receive Paul's message. Shortly afterward, a slave girl possessed by a spirit of divination was delivered through the authority of Christ. Following Paul's imprisonment and the miraculous opening of the prison doors, the Philippian jailer and his household also believed and were baptized. From these very different backgrounds, the Lord brought together a local expression of His one Body.

Historical Setting

Philippi was located in Macedonia, a region in the northern part of modern Greece. Named after Philip II of Macedon, the father of Alexander the Great, the city enjoyed strategic and political importance within the Roman Empire. Following a decisive Roman victory near Philippi in 42 B.C., the city became a Roman colony. As such, its citizens enjoyed privileges normally associated with Rome itself. Roman culture, customs, and civic pride strongly influenced the character of the city.

The strategic location of Philippi along the Via Egnatia, one of the major Roman highways, contributed significantly to its importance. Travelers, merchants, soldiers, and officials regularly passed through the city. This made Philippi an effective center for the spread of the gospel and the establishment of a Christian testimony.

Unlike many cities visited by Paul, Philippi appears to have had only a small Jewish population. There is no mention of a synagogue in Acts 16. Instead, Paul found a group gathered by a riverside place of prayer. This circumstance highlights the distinctly Gentile character of the church that emerged there. Yet despite its Gentile background, the church quickly developed into one of Paul's most faithful and spiritually healthy relationships.

Paul's Relationship with the Philippians

The bond between Paul and the believers in Philippi was unusually strong. From the beginning of their relationship, the Philippians demonstrated practical care and concern for the apostle. They repeatedly supported his ministry financially when other churches were unable or unwilling to do so. Their fellowship was not merely verbal but tangible and sacrificial.

Paul speaks of them with evident affection. He thanks God upon every remembrance of them and declares that he holds them in his heart (Phil. 1:3–8). Unlike the Galatians, who were being troubled by false teaching, or the Corinthians, who struggled with numerous disorders, the Philippians were generally healthy and faithful. While minor issues existed, particularly concerning unity among certain believers, the epistle contains very little correction. Instead, Paul writes primarily to encourage, strengthen, and deepen their experience of Christ.

This warm relationship helps explain the deeply personal tone of the letter. Paul shares his own experiences, struggles, aspirations, and spiritual discoveries. The reader gains unique insight into the inner life of an apostle who has learned the secret of contentment, perseverance, and joy in Christ.

Date and Circumstances of Writing

Philippians was written during Paul's imprisonment in Rome around A.D. 60–62. Along with Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon, it belongs to the group commonly known as the Prison Epistles. Yet among these letters, Philippians is the most personal and experiential.

The immediate occasion for writing was the arrival of Epaphroditus, whom the Philippians had sent to minister to Paul's needs. Bringing both practical support and encouragement, Epaphroditus became seriously ill during his journey and nearly died. After recovering, he was sent back to Philippi carrying Paul's letter (Phil. 2:25–30).

The epistle therefore combines thanksgiving, personal communication, pastoral encouragement, and spiritual instruction. Through it, Paul expresses gratitude for the believers' care while directing their attention continually back to Christ.

Purpose and Message

The central message of Philippians is the experience and enjoyment of Christ. Whereas Ephesians emphasizes God's purpose objectively, Philippians emphasizes Christ subjectively. The epistle reveals what it means for Christ to become the believer's life, strength, pursuit, and satisfaction.

Several major themes emerge throughout the letter.

- **Christ as Life** — "For to me, to live is Christ" (Phil. 1:21).
- **Christ as the Pattern of Humility** — The self-emptying and obedience of Christ provide the model for Christian living (Phil. 2:5–11).
- **Christ as the Believer's Pursuit** — Paul counts all things loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ (Phil. 3:7–14).
- **Christ as Strength and Sufficiency** — "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Phil. 4:13).
- **Joy in the Lord** — Rejoicing in Christ transcends outward circumstances.
- **Fellowship in the Gospel** — The believers participate together in the advancement of God's testimony.
- **The Mind of Christ** — Unity is preserved through humility, love, and mutual consideration.

The structure of the epistle reflects these themes. Chapter one presents Christ as the believer's life and testimony. Chapter two presents Christ as the pattern of humility and obedience. Chapter three presents Christ as the supreme object of pursuit and gain. Chapter four presents Christ as the source of strength, peace, contentment, and joy.

The progression is both beautiful and practical. Christ is first lived, then expressed, then pursued, and finally enjoyed. The entire epistle testifies that the Christian life is not fundamentally a matter of rules, regulations, or religious effort. It is a matter of experiencing and expressing the living Christ.

If Galatians may be summarized by "Not I, but Christ," and Ephesians by "Christ and the church according to God's eternal purpose," then Philippians may be summarized by the apostle's own declaration: "For to me, to live is Christ." Here the revelation of Christ becomes experience. The believer is invited beyond doctrine into fellowship, beyond knowledge into enjoyment, and beyond religious activity into a life wholly occupied with the Son of God.

8. Philippians — The Daily Experience of Christ: To Me, to Live Is Christ

If Galatians reveals Christ as our liberty and Ephesians unveils Christ and the church according to God's eternal purpose, Philippians brings us into the practical experience of Christ in daily living. Here the great revelations of the previous epistles become personal and experiential. The focus shifts from deliverance and purpose to the moment-by-moment enjoyment and expression of the living Christ. The Christian life is no longer viewed primarily from the perspective of doctrine or divine economy but from the perspective of experience. Philippians answers a vital question: How does a believer live in the reality of Christ day by day?

The answer is found in Paul's remarkable testimony: "For to me, to live is Christ" (Phil. 1:21). Few statements in Scripture penetrate more deeply into the heart of the Christian life. Paul does not say that Christ helps him live, guides his life, improves his life, or blesses his life. He declares that Christ is his life. The apostle had advanced beyond merely believing certain truths concerning Christ. Christ had become the very content, reality, and expression of his living. This is the practical outcome of the revelation unfolded in Galatians and Ephesians. The Christ who lives in the believer becomes the Christ who is lived by the believer.

The setting in which Paul writes makes this testimony all the more extraordinary. He is imprisoned in Rome. His future is uncertain. The possibility of execution stands before him. Yet the epistle is filled with joy, thanksgiving, confidence, and praise. Outwardly he is confined, but inwardly he enjoys an unbroken fellowship with Christ. His circumstances have not become easier; rather, Christ has become more real. The secret of the Christian life is therefore not the absence of trials but the presence of Christ within those trials.

Christ as Life

The central revelation of Philippians is Christ as the believer's life in practical experience. Galatians declares, "It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me" (Gal. 2:20). Philippians demonstrates what such a life looks like in practice. The indwelling Christ becomes the source of thought, motivation, strength, endurance, and joy. The believer learns to live not by self-effort but by the life of Another operating within.

Paul's entire outlook had been transformed by this reality. Formerly he had trusted in religious attainments, ancestral privileges, and personal achievements. Yet after seeing Christ, all these things lost their value. "What things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ" (Phil. 3:7). The apostle's ambition was no longer religious success but the gaining of Christ Himself. Everything else faded before the surpassing worth of knowing Him.

This pursuit was not merely intellectual. Paul desired to know Christ experientially: "that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings" (Phil. 3:10). The Christian life is therefore not merely the acceptance of doctrines concerning Christ but participation in Christ Himself. His resurrection power becomes available to believers in their daily walk. His life becomes their life. His strength becomes their strength. His mind becomes their mind.

Christ as the Pattern

Chapter two presents Christ as the supreme pattern of Christian living. Paul exhorts the believers to have the same mind that was in Christ Jesus (Phil. 2:5). He then unfolds one of the most profound passages in the New Testament concerning the humiliation and exaltation of Christ. In a letter devoted to the practical experience of Christ, Paul does not merely present teachings to be believed but a person to be followed. The life of Christ becomes both the source and the pattern of Christian living.

Though existing in the form of God, Christ did not regard equality with God as something to be grasped for His own advantage. Instead, He emptied Himself, took the form of a servant, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross (Phil. 2:6–8). The passage reveals not merely a doctrine concerning Christ but a pattern for those who follow Him. Humility, self-emptying, obedience, and submission to the Father's will characterize the life of Christ and therefore should characterize those who live by His life. The Lord did not seek His own glory, insist upon His own rights, or pursue His own interests. Rather, He continually submitted Himself to the Father's purpose, demonstrating the mind that God desires to reproduce in His people.

The pathway of Christ is the opposite of the world's pursuit of power, recognition, and self-exaltation. Fallen humanity seeks advancement through self-promotion, but Christ advanced through self-giving. The Lord descended before He ascended. He humbled Himself before He was exalted. Consequently, God highly exalted Him and bestowed upon Him the name above every name (Phil. 2:9–11). The Christian life follows the same principle. Genuine exaltation comes through humility, true greatness comes through servanthood, and lasting glory comes through obedience to God. The believer who lives Christ learns not to grasp for position or recognition but to trust the Father who exalts in His own time and according to His own purpose.

The practical significance of this passage extends beyond individual spirituality into the life of the church. Paul introduces the example of Christ within the context of preserving oneness among the believers. The mind of Christ is the antidote to rivalry, ambition, pride, and self-seeking. Wherever believers learn to take Christ as their pattern, the church is strengthened, fellowship is preserved, and the testimony of Christ is enhanced. Thus the humiliation and

exaltation of Christ are not merely historical events to admire but living principles to be experienced in the practical church life.

Christ as the Believer's Pursuit

The third chapter of Philippians presents one of the clearest pictures of spiritual pursuit found anywhere in Scripture. Although Paul had experienced Christ more deeply than perhaps any other believer of his generation, he did not regard himself as having arrived. Instead, he continued pressing forward. The Christian life is not static but progressive. Spiritual experience, however genuine, can never become a substitute for a fresh pursuit of Christ. The apostle understood that Christ is inexhaustible and that every new experience of Him opens the way for still greater discoveries of His riches.

Before his conversion, Paul possessed an impressive religious pedigree. He could point to his ancestry, his training, his zeal, and his strict observance of the law. Yet when Christ was revealed to him, all these former gains lost their value. "What things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ" (Phil. 3:7). Indeed, Paul went even further, declaring all things loss for the surpassing excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus his Lord. What once occupied the center of his life was displaced by a living person. The apostle's ambition was no longer religious achievement but the gaining of Christ Himself.

"One thing I do" (Phil. 3:13) summarizes the apostle's attitude throughout the remainder of his life. He forgot the things behind and stretched forward to the things before. This does not mean that Paul ignored God's faithfulness in the past, but he refused to allow previous experiences, accomplishments, failures, or victories to become the focus of his attention. His eyes remained fixed upon Christ and the heavenly calling of God. Spiritual growth is not maintained by looking backward but by pursuing Christ continually. Every fresh experience of Christ becomes a stepping stone toward deeper fellowship and fuller knowledge of Him.

The object of Paul's pursuit was not a doctrine, a blessing, or even a spiritual experience. It was Christ Himself. He desired to gain Christ, know Christ, experience the power of His resurrection, and participate in the fellowship of His sufferings (Phil. 3:10). Such language reveals that the Christian life is fundamentally relational rather than merely theological. The believer is called into an ever-deepening knowledge of a living person. As Christ becomes increasingly precious, all other pursuits assume their proper place beneath Him.

This pursuit exposes the poverty of merely religious Christianity. Many seek activity, knowledge, position, recognition, or spiritual attainments. Paul sought Christ. He understood that God's purpose is not merely to improve the believer but to bring the believer into union, fellowship, and conformity with His Son. Consequently, the Christian life is measured not by outward achievement but by the degree to which Christ is known, enjoyed, and expressed. The more Christ fills the believer's vision, the more every competing object loses its attraction.

Christ as Strength and Sufficiency

Chapter four reveals Christ as the believer's strength, peace, contentment, and sufficiency. Paul's circumstances varied greatly throughout his ministry. At times he experienced abundance; at other times he experienced need. At times he enjoyed freedom; at other times he endured

imprisonment. Yet he learned a secret that transcended circumstances. His confidence rested not in outward conditions but in the Christ who dwelt within him.

"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Phil. 4:13). This verse is often quoted, yet its context is significant. Paul is not speaking primarily about extraordinary achievements but about living faithfully under every circumstance. Whether in plenty or in want, whether honored or despised, whether free or imprisoned, Christ remained his sufficiency. The source of his strength was not natural ability, personal determination, or favorable conditions. It was Christ. The apostle had learned that the Lord Himself is the believer's enabling power and sustaining life.

Closely related to this experience is the matter of contentment. Paul declares that he learned how to be abased and how to abound. Such contentment is foreign to the natural man, who is continually governed by changing circumstances. The believer who enjoys Christ, however, discovers a source of satisfaction independent of outward conditions. Christ becomes sufficient whether circumstances improve or deteriorate. The secret of contentment is therefore not self-discipline but the enjoyment of Christ as an all-sufficient portion.

Likewise, the peace described in Philippians is not dependent upon outward tranquility. The peace of God guards the hearts and minds of believers because Christ Himself is present. Prayer, thanksgiving, and fellowship with God bring the believer into the enjoyment of a peace that surpasses human understanding (Phil. 4:6–7). This peace does not remove every difficulty but preserves the believer in the midst of difficulty. The result is a life characterized by stability, confidence, and rest in God despite the uncertainties of the present age.

The Fellowship of Christ

A significant theme running throughout Philippians is fellowship. The believers in Philippi shared in the fellowship of the gospel from the first day until the time of Paul's writing (Phil. 1:5). Their fellowship was not merely social interaction but participation in a common life, a common testimony, and a common purpose centered in Christ. The Greek word koinonia conveys the thought of sharing, participation, and mutual involvement. The Philippians were not merely spectators observing Paul's ministry from a distance. They actively participated in the advancement of the gospel through prayer, practical support, encouragement, and faithful partnership.

This fellowship illustrates the practical side of the church life. The believers cared for one another, supported the work of the gospel, and shared together in the grace of God. Their relationship with Paul demonstrates the reality of fellowship among the churches and among the saints. Christ was not merely experienced individually but enjoyed corporately. The church in Philippi repeatedly ministered to Paul's needs, even when other churches failed to do so. Such practical expressions of fellowship reveal that the life of Christ naturally produces mutual care, concern, and participation among believers.

The fellowship described in Philippians extends beyond material support or personal friendship. It originates in the common possession of Christ Himself. Every believer participates in the same divine life, drinks of the same Spirit, and belongs to the same Body. Consequently, fellowship is

not something artificially created by organizational effort but something that flows spontaneously from the life of Christ within His people. The more believers enjoy Christ, the more genuine fellowship develops among them. Conversely, when Christ is neglected, fellowship often deteriorates into mere outward association.

Such fellowship remains essential today. The Christian life was never intended to be isolated or individualistic. The Christ who lives within believers also joins them together in one Body. Through fellowship, life circulates among the saints, encouragement is supplied, burdens are shared, and spiritual growth is fostered. Fellowship also provides an environment in which light can shine, truth can be confirmed, and mutual care can be expressed. Thus the experience of Christ and the fellowship of the saints are inseparable realities. Where Christ is genuinely enjoyed, fellowship follows; where fellowship flourishes, Christ is more richly experienced.

The Secret of Joy

One of the most remarkable features of Philippians is its repeated emphasis upon joy. Rejoicing appears throughout the epistle despite the difficult circumstances under which it was written. This joy is not rooted in favorable conditions, material prosperity, physical comfort, or personal success. It is rooted in Christ Himself. The apostle writes from imprisonment, uncertain whether he will be released or executed, yet the epistle repeatedly calls believers to rejoice. Such joy can only be explained by the reality of Christ experienced within.

Paul had discovered that Christ is inexhaustible. Circumstances change, people disappoint, plans fail, and earthly things pass away, but Christ remains. Consequently, the believer who enjoys Christ possesses a source of joy untouched by outward conditions. This explains Paul's remarkable exhortation: "Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!" (Phil. 4:4). The command is not to rejoice in circumstances but in the Lord Himself. The source of joy is therefore not what happens around us but who Christ is within us.

This distinction is crucial. Human happiness rises and falls according to changing circumstances. Joy in the Lord, however, rests upon an unchanging person. The believer may pass through trials, disappointments, sufferings, or uncertainty and yet continue to experience joy because Christ remains unchanged. Paul himself provides the example. Chains could not rob him of joy because his joy was not located in freedom. Hardship could not rob him of joy because his joy was not located in comfort. His joy was found in Christ, who remained the same regardless of outward circumstances.

This joy serves as evidence that the Christian life is not merely a matter of obligation but of enjoyment. The Lord desires not only to save His people but also to become their satisfaction, delight, and portion. Joy becomes the spontaneous result of enjoying Christ. The more believers know Him, fellowship with Him, and experience His presence, the more joy becomes a normal characteristic of their lives. Such joy becomes a powerful testimony to the reality of Christ and demonstrates that the Christian life is fundamentally a life of divine enjoyment rather than religious duty.

The Practical Issue of Living Christ

Ultimately, Philippians presents the normal Christian life. The revelation is not reserved for apostles alone. Every believer is called to live by the life of Christ. The Christ who indwells His people desires to be expressed through them in every circumstance of life. Paul's testimony is therefore not merely a personal experience to admire but a spiritual reality available to every believer who learns to live in fellowship with the Lord.

To live Christ is to allow His thoughts to govern our mind, His love to govern our relationships, His humility to govern our conduct, His strength to govern our service, and His joy to govern our outlook. Such a life becomes a testimony to the reality of the indwelling Christ. The Christian life is not produced through self-improvement, religious effort, or personal determination. It is the outflow of Christ living within and being expressed through the believer. As the believer learns to abide in Christ, Christ becomes increasingly visible in daily life.

This practical expression of Christ extends into every area of human experience. It affects the believer's attitude toward suffering, relationships, work, service, and fellowship. It influences the atmosphere of the church life and contributes to the building up of the Body of Christ. The Christ who is enjoyed privately becomes the Christ who is expressed publicly. Thus the daily experience of Christ is not merely for personal benefit but also for the strengthening of the church and the advancement of God's purpose.

If Galatians proclaims, "Not I, but Christ," and Ephesians unveils Christ and the church according to God's eternal purpose, Philippians demonstrates the daily experience of that reality. Here Christ is not merely revealed, taught, or proclaimed. He is lived. The apostle's testimony becomes the believer's aspiration: "For to me, to live is Christ." The Christian life reaches its practical fulfillment when Christ becomes the content of our living and the center of our experience.

Thus Philippians brings us into the practical heart of the Christian life. Christ becomes our life, our pattern, our pursuit, our strength, our fellowship, and our joy. The result is a life that expresses Christ daily while advancing God's purpose upon the earth. What Galatians introduces and Ephesians unveils, Philippians demonstrates in experience. The Christ who lives in His people becomes the Christ who is lived through His people, producing a testimony that glorifies God and manifests the reality of His life in the world.

9. Introduction to Colossians

If Philippians reveals the practical experience of Christ in the daily life of the believer, Colossians unveils the supreme greatness of Christ Himself. The progression found in these four epistles reaches its highest point here. Galatians delivers believers from religion and brings them into the enjoyment of Christ as life. Ephesians unveils God's eternal purpose concerning Christ and the church. Philippians shows how Christ may be experienced and lived out in the practical circumstances of daily life. Colossians gathers all these revelations together and presents Christ in His universal greatness as the mystery of God, the image of the invisible God, the Firstborn of all creation, the Creator, Sustainer, and Head of all things. Here the reader arrives at the summit of Paul's revelation concerning Christ.

The burden of Colossians arises from a specific danger confronting the believers. Unlike Galatians, where the threat came primarily from Judaism, or Corinth, where the problems involved division and immorality, Colossians addresses subtle teachings that threatened to distract believers from the all-sufficiency of Christ. Elements of Jewish legalism, Greek philosophy, mysticism, ascetic practices, and angel worship were being introduced among the saints. Each of these teachings appeared spiritual in some respect, yet all shared a common defect: they shifted attention away from Christ Himself. Paul's response is not merely to refute error but to unveil a greater vision of Christ. When Christ is seen in His fullness, every substitute loses its appeal.

The central message of Colossians may be summarized in one declaration: Christ is all and in all (Col. 3:11). Throughout the epistle, Paul presents Christ as the answer to every spiritual need and the fulfillment of every divine purpose. Christ is not merely the Savior from sin. He is the mystery of God, the embodiment of the Godhead, the Head of the Body, the source of life, the reality of every positive thing in God's economy, and the One in whom all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden. Nothing can be added to Him because nothing exists outside His fullness.

This emphasis is especially significant because humanity continually seeks substitutes for Christ. Some pursue religious regulations. Others seek philosophical explanations. Still others are attracted to mystical experiences, spiritual techniques, or external forms of devotion. Yet Colossians declares that God's answer is not found in a system, practice, philosophy, or experience. God's answer is a Person. The Christian life begins with Christ, continues through Christ, and reaches its fulfillment in Christ. Everything God intends to accomplish is centered in His Son.

The Apostolic Church in Colossae

The epistle was addressed to "the saints and faithful brothers in Christ who are in Colossae" (Col. 1:2). Unlike some of Paul's other letters, the opening greeting does not explicitly use the expression "the church in Colossae." Nevertheless, the existence of a local church in the city is clearly established within the epistle itself.

The key evidence appears in Colossians 4:15–16. Paul writes, "Greet the brethren who are in Laodicea, and Nymphas and the church that is in his house" (Col. 4:15). This verse provides an important glimpse into early church life. The church in Laodicea was meeting in the house of Nymphas, illustrating once again the simple and practical character of the apostolic churches. The church was not identified by a special name, denomination, or organization, but by its locality and the believers who gathered there.

The reference to "the church that is in his house" has sometimes been misunderstood by modern readers. Some have assumed that the New Testament presents a pattern of multiple independent house churches existing within the same city. The biblical evidence points in a different direction. Throughout the New Testament, the consistent pattern is one church in one city. Jerusalem had the church in Jerusalem. Antioch had the church in Antioch. Corinth had the church in Corinth. Ephesus had the church in Ephesus. The churches were identified by their locality rather than by separate names, ministries, doctrines, or meeting places.

The mention of Nymphas's house therefore does not indicate a separate church existing alongside other churches in Laodicea. Rather, it identifies the location where the church in Laodicea gathered. The house was the meeting place; the church consisted of the believers in that city. In the earliest days, when the number of believers was relatively small and dedicated church buildings did not exist, homes frequently served as practical gathering places for the saints. Similar references appear elsewhere in the New Testament, such as the church meeting in the house of Prisca and Aquila (Rom. 16:5; 1 Cor. 16:19) and the church in the house of Philemon (Philem. 2). These passages describe where believers gathered, not the existence of multiple independent churches within a single locality.

Paul then continues, "Now when this epistle is read among you, see that it is read also in the church of the Laodiceans, and that you likewise read the epistle from Laodicea" (Col. 4:16). This instruction is highly significant. The letter being read "among you" refers to the believers in Colossae who had received the epistle. Paul then directs that it be read in "the church of the Laodiceans," while another letter associated with Laodicea was to be read by the believers in Colossae. The reciprocal exchange of letters demonstrates that both cities possessed identifiable local churches participating in the fellowship of the churches.

Thus, although the phrase "the church in Colossae" does not appear in the opening greeting, the existence of such a church is established by the closing instructions of the epistle itself. The believers in Colossae formed a local expression of the one Body of Christ, just as the believers in Laodicea, Ephesus, Philippi, Corinth, and other cities did throughout the apostolic age.

The exchange of letters between Colossae and Laodicea also provides valuable insight into the fellowship that existed among the apostolic churches. The churches were not isolated entities functioning independently of one another. They shared ministry, communication, mutual care, and spiritual fellowship while remaining distinct local expressions of the one universal Body of Christ. The circulation of apostolic letters among neighboring churches demonstrates both their interdependence and their common participation in the same divine revelation.

The reference to a letter associated with Laodicea has generated considerable discussion throughout church history. Whatever conclusions may be reached concerning its precise identity, Paul's instruction reveals that apostolic writings were intended to circulate among the churches. The churches did not regard themselves as self-contained religious units but as participants in a larger fellowship extending beyond their own locality. The same divine revelation that nourished the believers in one city was intended for the strengthening and edification of believers in other cities as well.

These closing verses therefore provide more than incidental historical details. They offer a valuable window into the practical church life of the first century. We see local churches identified according to cities, believers gathering in homes, fellowship among neighboring churches, the circulation of apostolic ministry, and the practical expression of the one Body of Christ throughout a region. Far from presenting a fragmented or independent model of church life, Colossians reveals local churches functioning in fellowship with one another while preserving the practical oneness established by Christ and maintained through the apostles.

Historical Setting

Colossae was located in the Lycus Valley of Asia Minor, in what is now western Turkey. Together with Laodicea and Hierapolis, it formed a cluster of neighboring cities situated along important trade routes. In earlier centuries Colossae had been a prosperous and influential city. By the first century, however, it had been overshadowed by the growing importance of nearby Laodicea.

The population of the region was diverse. Native Phrygians, Greeks, Romans, and a significant Jewish community lived side by side. As a result, various cultural, philosophical, and religious influences mingled throughout the area. This mixture helps explain the unique nature of the errors confronting the Colossian believers. The false teaching addressed in the epistle was not purely Jewish or purely Greek but a combination of several influences that collectively diminished the central place of Christ.

The environment surrounding the church was therefore marked by competing ideas concerning spirituality, wisdom, and access to God. Some emphasized legal observances and religious regulations. Others promoted mystical experiences and visionary practices. Philosophical speculation promised deeper knowledge, while ascetic disciplines claimed to produce greater holiness. Against this background, Paul proclaims the absolute supremacy and sufficiency of Christ.

Paul's Relationship to the Colossians

Unlike his relationships with the believers in Philippi, Corinth, or Ephesus, Paul apparently had never visited Colossae personally. He writes not as one who had labored extensively among them but as an apostle concerned for their spiritual welfare. This makes the letter particularly interesting because its authority does not rest upon personal familiarity but upon divine revelation.

Much of Paul's knowledge concerning the church came through Epaphras, whom he describes as a faithful minister of Christ (Col. 1:7–8). Epaphras had informed Paul concerning both the genuine spiritual growth of the believers and the dangers threatening their stability. As a result, the apostle writes with both appreciation and concern. He rejoices in their faith, love, and hope while simultaneously warning them against teachings that would draw them away from the simplicity and purity of Christ.

Paul's concern is not merely doctrinal accuracy. He desires that the believers be filled with the full knowledge of God's will, walk worthily of the Lord, and grow in the experiential knowledge of Christ. Throughout the epistle, his burden is intensely positive. Rather than becoming preoccupied with error, he continually directs attention toward the inexhaustible riches of Christ Himself.

Date and Circumstances of Writing

Colossians was written during Paul's first Roman imprisonment around A.D. 60–62. Along with Ephesians, Philippians, and Philemon, it belongs to the Prison Epistles. Though physically confined, Paul was spiritually occupied with Christ and the churches. The restrictions imposed by Rome could not hinder the ministry of divine revelation.

The letter was likely carried by Tychicus together with Onesimus, a believer from Colossae whose story is closely connected with the epistle to Philemon (Col. 4:7–9). Through these faithful brothers, Paul's ministry continued to strengthen and preserve the churches even while he remained imprisoned.

The fact that Colossians, Ephesians, Philippians, and Philemon were written during the same general period is significant. These letters collectively represent some of the highest revelations concerning Christ, the church, and God's eternal purpose. Physical imprisonment became the setting for spiritual revelation of extraordinary depth and richness.

Purpose and Message

The purpose of Colossians is to unveil the all-inclusive and all-extensive Christ and to preserve believers from every substitute that would diminish His centrality. Throughout the epistle, Paul demonstrates that Christ is sufficient because Christ is supreme.

Several major themes emerge throughout the letter.

- **Christ as the Mystery of God** — The invisible God is fully revealed in His Son.
- **Christ as the Image of the Invisible God** — God is made known through Christ.
- **Christ as Creator and Sustainer** — All things were created through Him and for Him.
- **Christ as the Head of the Body** — The church derives its life, direction, and growth from Christ.
- **Christ as the Fullness of God** — All the fullness of the Godhead dwells bodily in Him.
- **Christ as the Reality of Every Positive Thing** — Shadows, types, ordinances, and ceremonies find their fulfillment in Christ.
- **Christ as the Believer's Life** — The Christian life is rooted in union with Christ.
- **Christ as All and in All** — Christ becomes the content, center, and reality of God's people.

The structure of the epistle reflects these themes. Chapter one presents the greatness and supremacy of Christ. Chapter two exposes substitutes that distract from Christ's sufficiency. Chapter three unfolds Christ as the believer's life and practical reality. Chapter four concludes with instructions concerning fellowship, ministry, and the practical life of the churches.

If Galatians may be summarized by the declaration, "Not I, but Christ," Ephesians by "Christ and the church according to God's eternal purpose," and Philippians by "For to me, to live is Christ," then Colossians may be summarized by one glorious proclamation: Christ is all and in all.

Here the reader reaches the summit of Paul's revelation. Every line of divine truth converges upon one all-inclusive Person. The mystery hidden throughout the ages is unveiled. The fullness of God is revealed. The center of God's purpose stands fully disclosed. In Colossians, Christ occupies the place that belongs to Him alone: preeminent in all things.

10. Colossians — The Mystery of God: Christ, All-Inclusive and All-Extensive

Among all the revelations entrusted to the apostle Paul, few rise to the height of the vision presented in Colossians. If Galatians delivers believers from religion and brings them into the enjoyment of Christ as life, if Ephesians unveils God's eternal purpose concerning Christ and the church, and if Philippians reveals the practical experience of Christ in daily living, Colossians gathers these revelations together and directs our full attention to the incomparable greatness of Christ Himself. The epistle stands as one of the most comprehensive declarations of the person, work, and supremacy of Christ found anywhere in Scripture.

The burden of the letter is not merely doctrinal correction but spiritual vision. The believers in Colossae were being exposed to teachings that appeared profound, spiritual, and intellectually satisfying. Yet beneath their outward attractiveness lay a serious danger. These teachings diminished the centrality of Christ. Some emphasized philosophy. Others promoted religious regulations. Still others encouraged mystical experiences, ascetic practices, or fascination with angels. Paul's answer was not simply to argue against these things individually. Instead, he unveiled Christ in such fullness that every substitute was exposed as inadequate. Whenever Christ is seen as He truly is, competing claims lose their attraction.

The opening chapter immediately establishes the greatness of Christ. Paul does not begin with man's need but with God's Son. Christ is presented as "the image of the invisible God" (Col. 1:15). God, by nature, is invisible and beyond human comprehension. Yet in Christ the invisible God has been perfectly expressed and made known. The Lord Jesus does not merely represent God; He manifests God. To see Christ is to see the Father. Everything that God is in His nature, attributes, and character is revealed in the Son.

Paul continues by describing Christ as "the firstborn over all creation" (Col. 1:15). This expression does not suggest that Christ was created. Rather, it speaks of His preeminence, dignity, and unique position over all creation. The very next verse removes all uncertainty: "For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth" (Col. 1:16). The Creator cannot Himself be part of the created order. Christ is before all things because He is the eternal Son through whom all things came into existence.

The apostle then unfolds one of the most majestic descriptions of Christ found anywhere in Scripture. "For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers" (Col. 1:16). The scope is universal. Every realm of existence owes its origin to Christ. The visible creation, the invisible spiritual realm, earthly authorities, and angelic powers all derive their existence from Him. Nothing exists independently of Christ because all things were created through Him and for Him.

The revelation becomes even more profound when Paul adds, "And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist" (Col. 1:17). Christ is not merely the Creator who brought the universe into existence in the distant past. He is also the One who sustains it in the present. Every atom, every galaxy, every law governing creation continues because Christ upholds all things. The universe remains coherent because it is held together in Him. Without Christ, creation would dissolve into chaos. He is both its source and its sustaining center.

The Four Steps of Christ

The Christ revealed in Colossians is not merely the eternal Son existing before creation. He is the One who passed through the four great steps of God's economy: incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension. Through incarnation, the eternal Word became flesh and entered humanity. Through crucifixion, He accomplished redemption and terminated the old creation in God's sight. Through resurrection, He entered into a new realm of life and victory. Through ascension, He was exalted to the right hand of God as Lord and Christ.

These four steps are foundational to the divine revelation found throughout Paul's epistles. The Christ who created all things is the same Christ who became a man, died for sins, rose from the dead, and ascended into glory. His supremacy is therefore not merely a matter of divine status but also of accomplished redemption. The One who is before all things is also the One who has passed through death and emerged victorious on behalf of God's people.

The Two Great Becomings of Christ

The New Testament presents two great becomings concerning Christ. The first is found in John 1:14: "And the Word became flesh." This becoming corresponds to the first step of Christ's process—incarnation. The eternal Son of God entered humanity through the unique and miraculous operation of God. He did not cease to be God, nor was His deity diminished. Rather, the Son of God became the Son of Man, taking upon Himself genuine humanity while remaining fully divine.

The second becoming is found in 1 Corinthians 15:45: "The last Adam became a life-giving Spirit." This becoming is related to Christ's passing through crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension. The One who became flesh for redemption became the life-giving Spirit for impartation. Through His death, resurrection, and ascension, Christ entered into a new stage in God's economy whereby He could impart Himself as life to His believers.

According to John's Gospel, after His resurrection the Lord told Mary Magdalene, "I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God" (John 20:17). Later that same day He came to the disciples, breathed into them, and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit" (John 20:22). Thus the Christ who once walked beside His disciples could now enter into them as life. The first becoming brought God into humanity. The second becoming made it possible for Christ to impart Himself into His redeemed people.

The Mystery of God and the Mystery of Christ

The central declaration of Colossians appears in Colossians 2:2, where Paul speaks of "the mystery of God." The mystery hidden throughout the ages is Christ Himself. God is invisible, incomprehensible, and beyond the reach of fallen humanity. Yet in Christ the invisible God has been revealed, explained, and expressed. Everything that God desires to make known concerning Himself is embodied in His Son. Thus Christ is the mystery of God.

This revelation forms a remarkable parallel with Paul's teaching in Ephesians concerning "the mystery of Christ" (Eph. 3:4). Just as Christ is the mystery of God, so the church is the mystery of Christ. In Ephesians, Paul unveils the church as the Body of Christ, the one new man, and the

dwelling place of God in spirit. The church is the corporate expression of Christ just as Christ is the expression of God.

The relationship between these two mysteries reaches its highest expression in Ephesians 5:32. After discussing the relationship between husband and wife, Paul declares, "This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church." Human marriage itself becomes a picture of a greater divine reality. Christ and the church together constitute the great mystery hidden in God throughout the ages and now revealed through the apostles.

Thus the two epistles complement one another perfectly. Colossians presents Christ as the mystery of God. Ephesians presents the church as the mystery of Christ. God is expressed in Christ, and Christ is expressed in the church. The mystery begins with God revealed in Christ and reaches its corporate expression in the church as the Body of Christ.

The central message of Colossians may therefore be summarized in this way: Christ is the mystery of God, the explanation of God, and the manifestation of God. Everything that God is and desires to reveal concerning Himself is embodied in His Son. To know Christ is to know God. To receive Christ is to receive God. To experience Christ is to experience God. The mystery hidden throughout the ages has now been unveiled in the person of Jesus Christ.

In Whom Are Hidden All the Treasures of Wisdom and Knowledge

Paul further declares that in Christ "are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Col. 2:3). This statement directly challenges the philosophical tendencies confronting the Colossians. The false teachers promised deeper knowledge, higher wisdom, and advanced spiritual insight. They offered systems of thought that appeared sophisticated and profound. Yet Paul directs believers away from human speculation and toward Christ Himself.

The word "all" is significant. Not some treasures, but all treasures. Not certain aspects of wisdom, but the fullness of wisdom and knowledge. Everything necessary for understanding God's purpose, knowing God's will, and experiencing spiritual reality is found in Christ. Outside of Him there is only partial understanding and incomplete knowledge. In Him there is fullness.

This declaration also exposes the limitations of fallen human wisdom. Throughout history, philosophers have sought to answer life's deepest questions. They have debated the nature of reality, the meaning of existence, the origin of the universe, and the destiny of mankind. Yet despite centuries of inquiry, humanity remains unable to discover God through its own wisdom. Paul therefore directs believers to Christ as the repository of every treasure of wisdom and knowledge. What philosophy seeks, Christ embodies. What human speculation pursues, God has revealed in His Son.

The apostle's emphasis remains intensely practical. He is not encouraging intellectual curiosity for its own sake. Rather, he desires that believers become rooted in Christ and protected from deception. When Christ is known, the allure of false wisdom diminishes. When Christ is appreciated, substitutes lose their attractiveness. The safeguard against error is not merely the exposure of error but the fuller knowledge of Christ.

The Fullness of the Godhead

The apostle next presents one of the clearest affirmations of Christ's deity found anywhere in Scripture: "For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily" (Col. 2:9). This statement stands as a monumental declaration concerning the person of Christ. He is not merely a prophet, teacher, messenger, or representative of God. He is the embodiment of the fullness of the Godhead.

The significance of Paul's language cannot be overstated. He does not say that a portion of deity dwells in Christ. He does not say that Christ possesses certain divine attributes. Rather, all the fullness of the Godhead dwells in Him bodily. Everything that God is in His divine being is fully present in Christ. The invisible God has become visible in the Son. The unknowable God has been made known in Christ.

This truth directly refutes every attempt to reduce Christ to a lesser status. Throughout history, various teachers have portrayed Him as merely a created being, a highly exalted angel, or a spiritual intermediary standing between God and man. Colossians leaves no room for such interpretations. The fullness of the Godhead dwells bodily in Christ. He is fully God and fully man, the unique God-man through whom God has revealed Himself to humanity.

The Incarnate Christ and the Fullness of God

The declaration that all the fullness of the Godhead dwells bodily in Christ is especially significant when considered in light of the incarnation. The eternal Word became flesh without surrendering His deity. The Son of God became the Son of Man while remaining fully God. Thus in the incarnate Christ, deity and humanity are joined in one unique person.

This reality elevates the incarnation far above anything contemplated by human philosophy or religion. The mystery is not that God is somehow diffused throughout creation. The mystery is that the fullness of God has been embodied in Christ. God has not merged with creation. Rather, He has revealed Himself through the incarnate Son.

This distinction is crucial because many philosophical systems blur the line between Creator and creation. The New Testament consistently maintains that distinction. Christ is before all things, through Him all things were created, and in Him all the fullness of the Godhead dwells bodily. The Creator remains distinct from creation even while entering humanity through incarnation and imparting His life to redeemed believers.

You Are Complete in Him

Immediately following this great declaration, Paul adds, "and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power" (Col. 2:10). This statement forms one of the practical applications of Christ's fullness. Because all the fullness of the Godhead dwells in Christ, believers possess complete spiritual provision in Him.

The false teachers implied that Christ alone was insufficient. Additional practices, regulations, mystical experiences, or special knowledge were allegedly necessary to reach spiritual maturity. Paul rejects such thinking entirely. Believers are complete in Christ because Christ Himself is

complete. Nothing needs to be added to Him, and therefore nothing needs to be added to those who are in Him.

This does not mean believers have exhausted the riches of Christ. Rather, it means that everything they need is already found in Him. Spiritual growth does not come through acquiring something beyond Christ. It comes through growing in the knowledge, enjoyment, and experience of Christ Himself.

Christ and Religious Substitutes

One of the dominant themes throughout Colossians is the danger of substitutes. Fallen humanity consistently seeks something alongside Christ or in place of Christ. Religious systems offer rules and regulations. Philosophical systems offer explanations. Mystical systems promise extraordinary experiences. Ascetic systems promote self-denial as a means of spiritual attainment.

Paul exposes the inadequacy of every substitute because each one ultimately distracts from Christ. The issue is not whether certain practices possess historical or religious significance. The issue is whether they displace Christ from His central place.

This concern becomes evident in Paul's discussion of food regulations, festivals, new moons, and Sabbaths (Col. 2:16–17). These things had a legitimate place within God's historical dealings with Israel, yet Paul describes them as shadows. A shadow possesses value only because it points to something greater. Once the reality arrives, the shadow no longer occupies the central place.

Christ is the reality. The ceremonies, ordinances, and observances were anticipatory shadows pointing toward Him. To become occupied with the shadow after the arrival of the reality is to misunderstand God's intention. The purpose of every type, symbol, and ordinance is fulfilled in Christ.

Likewise, Paul warns against fascination with angels and visionary experiences (Col. 2:18). Such things may appear spiritual, but they become dangerous whenever they divert attention from Christ. Spirituality is not measured by unusual experiences but by one's relationship with Christ. The believer's focus must remain upon Him rather than upon secondary matters.

The apostle therefore presents Christ as God's answer to every substitute. Humanity seeks wisdom; Christ is wisdom. Humanity seeks fullness; fullness dwells in Christ. Humanity seeks spiritual reality; Christ is the reality. Humanity seeks access to God; God is revealed in Christ. Everything that fallen humanity seeks apart from Christ is ultimately found in Christ Himself.

Christ the Head of the Body

The revelation of Colossians does not stop with Christ's relationship to God or creation. Paul also presents Christ in relation to the church. "And He is the head of the body, the church" (Col. 1:18). The same Christ who created all things and sustains all things is also the Head of God's redeemed people.

This truth forms an important bridge between Colossians and Ephesians. Ephesians emphasizes the church as the Body of Christ according to God's eternal purpose. Colossians emphasizes Christ as the Head from whom the Body receives its life and supply. The two revelations are complementary and inseparable. A body without a head cannot function. A head without a body lacks corporate expression. The Head and the Body belong together in God's economy.

The headship of Christ is not merely a matter of authority, though authority is certainly included. The head is also the source of direction, coordination, nourishment, and growth. Everything that the Body requires comes from the Head. Spiritual life does not originate within believers themselves. It flows from Christ.

For this reason Paul warns against teachings that fail to hold fast to the Head (Col. 2:19). Whenever believers become occupied with regulations, philosophies, personalities, or experiences apart from Christ, they risk losing sight of the One from whom all spiritual supply proceeds. True growth comes not from external systems but from living union with Christ.

The Christ revealed in Colossians is therefore not only the mystery of God and the embodiment of divine fullness. He is also the living Head of the church. The Creator of the universe is the Head of the Body. The One who upholds all things is the source of the church's life. The One who fills all things is also the One from whom the Body receives its increase.

Thus Paul's vision continually returns to the same central reality: Christ Himself. Whether viewed in relation to God, creation, redemption, wisdom, fullness, or the church, Christ occupies the preeminent place. Everything proceeds from Him, everything depends upon Him, and everything finds its fulfillment in Him.

Christ Our Life

Having unveiled the greatness of Christ in relation to God, creation, and the church, Paul now turns to the believer's practical experience. The Christ who is the mystery of God, the Creator of all things, and the Head of the Body is also the life of every believer. "For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God" (Col. 3:3). The Christian life is not merely a matter of following teachings, observing commandments, or imitating an example. It is a matter of possessing and living by Christ as life.

This truth reaches its climax in Paul's declaration: "When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory" (Col. 3:4). The apostle does not merely say that Christ gives life or improves life. He says that Christ is our life. The believer possesses a new source of living altogether. The old Adamic life has been judged through the cross, and a new life has been imparted through union with the risen Christ.

This revelation harmonizes with Paul's testimony in Galatians: "It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me" (Gal. 2:20). It also corresponds with the revelation of Romans 8, where the mind set on the Spirit results in life and peace. The Christ who passed through incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension has become available to His people as their life and supply. Thus the Christian life is not fundamentally self-improvement but Christ-expression.

The New Man

Paul then turns from the individual experience of Christ as life to the corporate realm of God's new creation. He exhorts believers to put off the old man with his practices and to put on the new man, which is being renewed unto full knowledge according to the image of Him who created him (Col. 3:9–10).

The contrast between the old man and the new man is profound. The old man represents fallen humanity in Adam. It encompasses all that belongs to the old creation with its divisions, prejudices, ambitions, and natural distinctions. The new man belongs to an entirely different order. It is the new creation brought forth through Christ's death and resurrection.

Paul's language here recalls the revelation of Galatians concerning the new creation. There the apostle declares that neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but a new creation (Gal. 6:15). In Ephesians, this same reality appears corporately as the one new man created through Christ's reconciling work (Eph. 2:15). In Colossians, the emphasis falls upon the character and constitution of the new man itself.

Thus Romans, Galatians, Ephesians, and Colossians present complementary aspects of one divine reality. Romans emphasizes the Spirit as the power of the new life. Galatians emphasizes the new creation produced through that life. Ephesians presents the one new man as God's corporate expression. Colossians unveils the content and reality of the new man.

Christ Is All and in All

Paul then arrives at one of the most remarkable statements in the New Testament: "where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all" (Col. 3:11).

The word "where" is significant. Paul is describing the sphere of the new man. Within this realm, the distinctions that characterize fallen humanity no longer determine standing before God. Nationality, culture, social status, religious background, and ethnic identity cease to be the governing factors. The old creation is marked by division. The new creation is characterized by Christ.

It is important to understand this statement within its immediate context. Paul is not presenting a form of pantheism in which Christ becomes identical with the created universe. Nor is he teaching that individual distinctions cease to exist altogether. The context concerns the new man. The categories listed in the verse are human categories. Paul's burden is to show that within the new creation Christ becomes the unique reality, life, and constituent of God's redeemed people.

This point is strengthened by comparison with Galatians and Ephesians. In Galatians, the apostle points to the new creation as the answer to distinctions such as circumcision and uncircumcision. In Ephesians, he reveals the one new man created through Christ's reconciling work. In Colossians, he describes the character of that new man. Christ is all because He is the unique constituent of the new creation. Christ is in all because He indwells every member of the new man.

Consequently, Paul's thought remains firmly within the realm of redemption and new creation. The Creator remains distinct from creation. Earlier in the epistle Paul has already declared that all things were created through Christ and for Christ. The One who created all things is not identical with all things. Rather, through His redemptive work He becomes the life and reality of God's new creation.

The Centrality and Universality of Christ

The revelation of Colossians has often been summarized by the expression "the centrality and universality of Christ." This phrase captures the unique position occupied by Christ throughout the epistle.

Christ is the centrality of God's purpose because everything converges upon Him. Creation exists through Him and for Him. Redemption is accomplished by Him. The church derives its life from Him. The fulfillment of God's eternal purpose centers in Him. Every line of divine revelation ultimately points to Christ.

At the same time, Christ is the universality of God's purpose because His person and work extend throughout every aspect of God's economy. He is before all things. He sustains all things. He fills all things. Nothing lies outside the scope of His supremacy. Nothing exists independently of His sustaining power. Nothing in God's purpose can be understood apart from Him.

This same thought has often been expressed by describing Christ as both the center and circumference of God's economy. He is the center because all things converge upon Him. He is the circumference because all things are encompassed within the scope of His person and work. From beginning to end, God's purpose is Christ-centered.

Yet this universality must be understood according to the context of Scripture. Paul is not teaching pantheism or the dissolution of the distinction between Creator and creation. Rather, he is revealing the all-inclusive Christ who stands at the center of God's purpose and fills every aspect of God's redemptive plan. The universality of Christ is the universality of His person, work, and divine economy, not a philosophical identification of God with creation.

The Consummation of Paul's Revelation

When the revelations of Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians are viewed together, a remarkable progression emerges. Galatians delivers believers from religion and unveils Christ as life. Ephesians reveals Christ and the church according to God's eternal purpose, presenting the church as the mystery of Christ. Philippians shows how Christ may be experienced and lived out in daily circumstances. Colossians brings these revelations to their highest point by unveiling Christ as the mystery of God, the all-inclusive and all-extensive One.

The Christ revealed in Colossians is the One who passed through incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension. He is the One who became flesh and who, through His completed work, became the life-giving Spirit for the impartation of divine life. He is the Creator, Sustainer, Redeemer, Head of the Body, life of the believer, and constituent of the new man. Everything that God intends to accomplish is centered in Him.

Conclusion

The message of Colossians stands as a perpetual call back to Christ Himself. Whenever believers become occupied with philosophy, religion, ordinances, mystical experiences, personalities, movements, or secondary matters, the Spirit directs their attention again to God's Son. The answer is not found in a system. The answer is not found in a method. The answer is not found in a religious form.

The answer is Christ.
Christ, the mystery of God.
Christ, the image of the invisible God.
Christ, the Creator and Sustainer of all things.
Christ, the embodiment of the fullness of the Godhead.
Christ, the Head of the Body.
Christ, our life.
Christ, the constituent of the new man.
Christ, the centrality and universality of God's purpose.
Christ, all-inclusive and all-extensive.
Christ, all and in all.

11. Conclusion — The Heart of the Divine Revelation

The four epistles examined in this book—Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians—present a progressive unveiling of Christ and God's eternal purpose. Each epistle contributes a distinct aspect of divine revelation, yet all converge upon one central reality. Taken together, they reveal what may rightly be called the heart of the divine revelation.

Galatians confronts the tendency of fallen humanity to substitute religion for Christ. The believers in Galatia had begun well but were in danger of turning from the living Christ to religious observances and legal requirements. Paul's answer was not a better religious system but Christ Himself. "It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me" stands as one of the great declarations of the Christian life. The issue is not self-improvement through religious effort but Christ living within His people. The epistle concludes by directing attention to the new creation, where neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but a new creation.

Ephesians carries the reader further into God's eternal purpose. Here Paul unveils the mystery of Christ, hidden throughout the ages and revealed through the apostles. The church is presented as the Body of Christ, the one new man, and the dwelling place of God in spirit. What was accomplished through Christ's redemptive work is now expressed corporately in the church. The great mystery spoken of in Ephesians 5 is Christ and the church. Just as Christ is the expression of God, the church becomes the corporate expression of Christ.

Philippians brings the revelation into the realm of practical experience. The Christ revealed in Galatians and Ephesians is not merely a subject for theological contemplation. He is to be lived. Paul's testimony, "For to me, to live is Christ," presents the normal Christian life in its highest expression. Christ is experienced in daily circumstances, difficulties, sufferings, service, fellowship, and joy. The Christian life is not merely believing certain truths about Christ but allowing Christ Himself to be lived out through the believer.

Colossians brings the revelation to its summit. Here Christ is unveiled as the mystery of God, the image of the invisible God, the Creator and Sustainer of all things, the embodiment of the fullness of the Godhead, the Head of the Body, the life of believers, and the constituent of the new man. Every line of revelation converges upon Christ. He is the explanation of God, the center of God's purpose, and the One in whom all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden. The epistle culminates in the declaration that within the new man, Christ is all and in all.

These four epistles therefore reveal a remarkable progression. Galatians presents Christ as life in contrast to religion. Ephesians presents Christ and the church according to God's eternal purpose. Philippians presents Christ as the believers' daily experience. Colossians presents Christ in His universal greatness as the mystery of God. Together they form a unified testimony concerning God's purpose in Christ.

The revelation of these epistles also harmonizes with the broader testimony of the New Testament. The eternal Word became flesh through incarnation. Through crucifixion He accomplished redemption. Through resurrection He triumphed over death. Through ascension He was exalted to the highest place in the universe. The Christ who passed through these four great steps of God's economy is now revealed as the life and reality of God's people.

The New Testament further reveals two great mysteries. Colossians presents Christ as the mystery of God. Everything that God is and desires to make known concerning Himself is embodied in Christ. Ephesians presents the church as the mystery of Christ. The church becomes the corporate expression of the Christ who expresses God. Thus the mystery of God is Christ, and the mystery of Christ is the church. God is expressed in Christ, and Christ is expressed in the church.

This revelation also sheds light upon the relationship between the Spirit, the new creation, the one new man, and the new man. Romans reveals the life-giving operation of the Spirit. Galatians reveals the new creation produced through Christ's redemptive work. Ephesians unveils the one new man created through the cross. Colossians reveals the character and content of the new man, where Christ is all and in all. These are not separate themes but complementary aspects of one divine reality.

The practical implication of this revelation is profound. The Christian life is not fundamentally a matter of religion, ritual, philosophy, self-improvement, or outward activity. God's purpose is centered in a Person. Christ is the source, content, reality, and goal of the Christian life. Every aspect of God's economy points to Him. Every spiritual blessing is found in Him. Every divine purpose is fulfilled through Him.

This realization provides the answer to many of the problems that have plagued Christianity throughout the centuries. Whenever believers become occupied with secondary matters, divisions arise. Whenever systems, traditions, personalities, movements, or doctrines are elevated above Christ, confusion follows. The apostolic writings consistently direct attention back to Christ Himself. He alone occupies the central place in God's purpose.

The heart of the divine revelation is therefore not a system of theology, an organization, a movement, or a collection of doctrines. The heart of the divine revelation is Christ.

Christ revealed as the mystery of God.
Christ expressed through the church as the mystery of Christ.
Christ living in His believers.
Christ experienced in daily life.
Christ as the life and constituent of the new man.
Christ as the center and reality of God's eternal purpose.

The final testimony of these epistles is clear. God's purpose begins with Christ, proceeds through Christ, and reaches its fulfillment in Christ. Everything originates in Him, is sustained through Him, and ultimately points back to Him. From eternity past to eternity future, Christ remains the center of God's economy and the focus of divine revelation.

The heart of the divine revelation is Christ.